3 Tenn. Aides Charged in Parole-for-Pay Plot

NASHVILLE, Dec. 16 (AP)—Three aides to Gov. Ray Blanton, including his legal adviser, have been charged in an alleged parole-for-pay scheme operated in part from the governor's office, the FBI said.

The men were charged with conspiracy and extortion in a scheme to arrange the sale of pardons, paroles and commutations for seven prisoners.

In one case involving $100,000, an escape was allegedly considered.

Participants in the alleged extortion were told that Blanton knew of the practice, an FBI affidavit filed in U.S. District Court said.

No charges were filed against the governor. A spokesman described Blanton as "deeply shaken" by the allegations and said he plans to meet with the three men before issuing a statement.

An FBI official said that evidence examined so far may be only "the tip of the iceberg."

An informant identified only as Mr. B was secretly recorded discussing details of one alleged payoff during a long-distance telephone call to an aide in the governor's office, according to FBI documents.

Other conversations were videotaped, authorities said.

FBI agents on Friday arrested T. Edward Sisk, Blanton's legal counsel; Charles Benson, Sisk's extradition assistant, and Lt. Charles Frederick Taylor, a 15-year Tennessee Highway Patrol vetera. The FBI said Taylor was assigned to Blanton's security staff, but the Blanton spokesman said this was incorrect.

Agents said Sisk and Benson were carrying $1,200 and $2,300, respectively, at the time of their arrests—part of $10,000 in marked money allegedly given Taylor by Mr. B.

Sisk and Benson were freed on $50,000 bond each after their arrests in Nashville. Taylor was arrested in Memphis and held in lieu of $100,000 bond.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Joe Brown told Magistrate Kent Sandidge that tape recordings made during an investigation that began in 1975 disclosed that threats had been made against anyone who might testify for the government.

Hearings for the three were scheduled for Friday.

An affidavit filed in District Court by FBI agent Corbett E. Hart Jr. said Blanton and J.P. Murrell, a special assistant to the governor, were identified in secretly recorded conversations as among "participants or who had knowledge of this activity."

Murrell, who was not charged, could not be reached for comment.

Hart submitted an affidavit to the federal court in which Taylor was quoted as saying Blanton knew of the scheme.

"Okay, you, you said that Blanton knows and has already given his okay all . . . [inaudible]?" Mr. B asked in the case of two convicts.

"Yeah, yeah," a voice purported to be Taylor's responded.

Later, Taylor allegedly told Mr. B about 30 sentences would be reduced in Blanton's final week in office "so it would just be reported at once."

Blanton, a Democrat, did not seek reelection last month. His term expires Jan. 20. The governor said before the election that he planned to free Roger Humphreys, the son of a political ally who had been convicted of second-degree murder in the deaths of his wife and her lover. Blanton withdrew the pledge after it became an election issue.

The officer allegedly arranged the parole of Larry Ed Hacker, the reputed mastermind of a 1977 escape from Brushy Mountain State Penitentiary involving seven men, including James Earl Ray, convicted assassin of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.